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Oral Testimony on the top priority in food and agricultural research that NIFA should address, and on the most promising science opportunities for advancement of food and agricultural sciences

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Good morning! I'm Sarah Ohlhorst, Senior Director of Advocacy and Science Policy for the American Society for Nutrition. ASN appreciates the opportunity to submit comments to the U.S. Department of Agriculture National Institute of Food and Agriculture regarding the Society's top food and agricultural research priority to be addressed by NIFA. ASN is a not-for-profit scientific society with over 6,500 members working in academia, clinical practice, government and industry in more than 75 countries around the world. ASN currently reaches over 36 million people annually with the highest quality nutrition information. Our members have been actively involved in the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative, the competitive grants program administered by NIFA, both as recipients of such grants and by serving on grant review panels. ASN is extremely appreciative of NIFA's support for human nutrition research and for your responsiveness to stakeholder input.

ASN believes that a top priority in food and agricultural research that NIFA should address is human nutrition across the lifespan. While ASN fully supports NIFA's funding of research to better understand the causes of obesity and implement effective prevention interventions, it is imperative that NIFA continue to support other important human nutrition research topics. The U.S. must maintain and enhance the potential for future scientific breakthroughs to be achieved in many areas of nutrition, in addition to focusing on our most immediate public health concerns like obesity. To this end, ASN supports maintaining an emphasis on integrated programs and multidisciplinary teams, while also providing significant funding for investigator-initiated applied and basic nutrition research. Such research informs our understanding and implementation of health promoting-lifestyles and dietary practices to lead to future health advances, improve nutrition across the lifespan and optimize quality of life, and therefore should remain a priority at NIFA.

ASN identified the most promising science opportunities for advancement of nutritional research, ASN's Nutrition Research Priorities whose advancement will have the greatest projected impact on the future health and well-being of global populations, as well as on food and agricultural sciences. ASN Nutrition Research Priorities highlight the following areas:

- Variability in Responses to Diet and Food
Individual variability in metabolic responses to diet and food
- The Impact of Nutrition on Healthy Growth, Development and Reproduction

Epigenetics and imprinting - how exposures to dietary components during critical periods of development “program” long-term health and wellbeing.

- **The Role of Nutrition in Health Maintenance**
Including non-communicable disease prevention and treatment, as well as weight management throughout life.
- **The Role of Nutrition in Medical Management**
The translation of nutrition research advances into evidence-based practice and policy to ensure optimal patient care and effective disease management across the lifespan.
- **Nutrition-Related Behaviors**
Understanding the link between behavior and food choices to tackle obesity and other nutrition-related issues of extreme public health import.
- **Food Supply/ Environment**
Understanding how the food environment affects dietary and lifestyle choices is necessary before effective policies can be instituted that will change a population’s diet in a meaningful way.

In addition, ASN identified the following five tools as essential for advancing nutrition research to the next level: omics; health- and bio-informatics; databases; biomarkers; and cost effectiveness analysis.

ASN applauds the large proportion of NIFA support that is used to prepare the next generation of nutrition scientists by ensuring that training and careers are sustained for years to come. ASN considers this career training essential and suggests that NIFA consider providing additional training opportunities, such as for first-time AFRI applicants. ASN also applauds the important work NIFA does to promote consumer nutrition education, which is essential for achieving public health by helping consumers make informed healthy choices.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. ASN appreciates the important work that NIFA does and looks forward to future opportunities to work with the Agency to further enhance NIFA’s human nutrition research contributions.